

CONVENTIONS OF THE NEW ORTHOGRAPHY

The new script used here went through a series of stages; firstly in 1956 one containing some Cyrillic letters, then one with unassimilated Chinese loans in their *pinyin* form, and finally the current version since mid-1958. For a comparison with the development of scripts for other related nationalities of China, see Bradley (1987). This new Lisu script as used here has been the vehicle of very extensive publication in China. Apart from the usual political works published in the 1960s and early 1970s, a large body of primary school textbooks, adult literacy materials, traditional stories, songs and new literature has appeared, especially in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Compared to the Fraser script, the new script has some minor inadequacies. Most notably, it does not distinguish all the vowels nor does it distinguish the palatal and alveolar nasals before /i/. Therefore this dictionary uses a slightly modified version of the script that does make these distinctions, writing /ɲi/ as **nyi** and /ni/ as **ni**; this contrast is marginal in some tones but not for all. The vowel distinctions are also made, as discussed below.

Lisu has the following initial consonants:

	bilabial	alveolar		palatal	velar	
voiceless unaspirated	p	t	ts	tɕ	k	ʔ
voiceless aspirated	ph	th	tsh	tɕh	kh	
voiced	b	d	dz	dʑ	g	
voiceless fricative	f	s		ɕ	x	h
voiced fricative	v	z		j ~ ʑ	ɣ	
nasal	m	n		ɲ	ŋ	ɸ
approximant	w	l	r			

There are also clusters of most of these initials, notably the alveolar affricates, alveopalatal affricates or velars plus medial /i/, especially before /a/; and of bilabials and more rarely others plus medial /j/, both before /a/ and one or two other vowels such as /o/ and /æ/. In the central dialect these bilabials plus medial /j/ may also precede /ø/, but not in the northern dialect where such forms change to bilabial plus /i/ (e.g. central 'to fly' /bjø 44/, northern /bi 44/).

The new orthography represents these consonants as follows:

	bilabial	alveolar		palatal	velar	
voiceless unaspirated	b	d	z	j	g	Ø
voiceless aspirated	p	t	c	q	k	
voiced	bb	dd	zz	jj	gg	
voiceless fricative	f		s	sh	h	h
voiced fricative	v		ss	y/e-	e-	
nasal	m	n		ni-	ng	h-n
approximant	w	l	r			

The /ʔ f v w j y/ (written with **Ø f v w y e-**) distinction is marginal, and largely conditioned by the following vowel; in native Lisu vocabulary contrasts between these occur

only before certain vowels. The graphic sequences **ea** and **eo** represent /**ya**/ and /**yo**/, and **ei** represents /**ji**/, but otherwise consonant plus **-e** is used to represent a back unrounded vowel sound. The /**h**/ versus /**x**/ distinction is also marginal and not indicated in the new script. Medial /**w**/ and /**j**/ are written with **u** and **i**: for example, /**kwa**/ is written **gua** and /**bja**/ is written **bbia**. Note also the above comments about **ni**- representing /**ɲ**/ before vowels other than /**i**/.

There is also a set of five palato-alveolar initials which occur in native Lisu words only before a fricative syllabic [ʒ]. These are [tʃʒ] [tʃhʒ] [dʒʒ] [ʃʒ] [ʒʒ], written **zhi chi rri shi ri**. Neither the new northern dialect orthography nor the Fraser script distinguish the fricative syllabics from other high front vowels. The syllabic appears to function as an allophone of /**i**/ in the northern dialect, though in the Fraser script representing the central dialect it is written as an allophone of the high front rounded vowel /**y**/. These palato-alveolars are also used in Chinese loan words before various vowels in place of the Chinese retroflexes.

The complete Lisu vocalic system distinguishes ten vowels:

IPA				orthography			
i	y	ɯ	u	i	<u>u</u>	<u>e</u>	u
e	ø	ɤ	o	ei	<u>ei</u>	e	o
æ		a		ai		a	

Underlining is used in this dictionary to distinguish words containing the front rounded vowels and the high back unrounded vowel from other homographic vowels; it is not used in the Lisu orthography in China, however, which is in this way seriously deficient. Fortunately for the intelligibility of the orthography, the functional load of these contrasts is lower than that of some other vowels; moreover the front rounded vowels are more or less marginal in some varieties of northern Lisu including the “standard” variety. Note also the ambiguity of **ni** between initial /**ɲ**/ when followed by another vowel or the complete syllables /**ni**/ or /**ɲi**/. Likewise note the ambiguity between medial /**w**/ and /**j**/, between the vowels /**u**/ and /**i**/, and between initial **e**- for /**j**/ or /**ɣ**/ versus vocalic **e** for /**ɤ**/ or /**ɯ**/.

Every Lisu syllable has a tone; there are six contrasting tones, represented in the orthography used here by a consonant letter following the vowel of the syllable. As there are no final consonants in Lisu, this does not cause any problems for one-syllable words, but it means that, as in *pinyin*, syllable boundaries must sometimes be marked with an apostrophe to disambiguate them - that is, where a consonant letter could either be the tone at the end of one syllable or all or part of the initial consonant of the following one.

IPA	orthography
55 high level	-l
44 mid-high level	-x
33 mid level	(unmarked)
21 low falling	-t
35 mid-high rising	-q
<u>21</u> low falling, short, final glottal stop	-r

For example, a six-way minimal pair for the tones is:

to aim/millstone	mol ²
see	mox ¹
high	mo
old	mot ¹
tattoo	moq
weed/to weed	mor

For the nasalised cavity fricative [h̃] the **h** of its digraph precedes the vowel, and the **n** of its digraph follows the vowel but precedes the tone, as in **heinq** ‘stir’ [h̃ø 35]. As in the case of the digraph **h-n**, several other syllables are nasalised throughout in Lisu; this is represented by a syllable-final **-n**. These include nearly all one-syllable stems (but not formative prefixes) with glottal stop initial, for example **on** ‘goose’, **onl** ‘ferment’, **an** ‘put up’, **un** or **ein** ‘read’ and so on. See Matisoff (1975) on rhinoglottophilia, this tendency to nasalise syllables with initial [h̃] and glottal stop, and Bradley (1989) for its distribution as a syllable prosody in Lisu, Lahu and other closely related languages. Where necessary to disambiguate sequences within words, an apostrophe is used to indicate the syllable boundary.

In many cases the central dialect form differs from the northern dialect; some of these differences reflect different tone sandhi patterns in four-syllable compounds, others reflect unmerged versus merged forms such as central /-jə/ contrasting with /i/ after bilabials but northern /i/ only. The most frequent differences, however, are sporadic vowel differences, most often between back unrounded /ɯ/ in the northern dialect versus front rounded /ø/ in the central dialect, especially after alveopalatal initials, as in ‘tongue’ northern **la'qe** [la 33 **tchɯ** 33], central **la'qei** [la 33 **tchø** 33]. Within the northern dialect the differences are fewer; but one major difference is in the merger of palatalised bilabials to alveopalatals, as in ‘bee’ **bbiat** [bja 21] or **jjiat** [dʒa 21] and ‘eye’ **mia** [mja 33] or **nia** [ɲa 33].

PACIFIC LINGUISTICS
Series C – 126

A DICTIONARY OF THE NORTHERN DIALECT OF LISU (CHINA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA)

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Copyright © The Author
Copyedited by Joan Birnie
Printed by ANU Printing Service

First Published 1994
Typeset by Jeanette Coombes
Bound by F & M Perfect Bookbinding

This publication was made possible by an initial grant from the Hunter Douglas Fund.
No royalties are paid on this or any other *Pacific Linguistics* publication.

ISSN 0078-7558

ISBN 0 85883 423 5